

ONE BRITON FIGHTS
12 GERMAN AIRMEN

Lieutenant in Scout Machine
Dived Into a Squadron, Firing
as He Flew.

DARING STUNTS IN WEST

British Fliers Usually Mere
Boys, Few Being Over Twenty-five Years.

WITH THE BRITISH ARMY IN FRANCE, Feb. 1 (by mail).—The announcement that "improved weather conditions permitted increased aerial activity along the entire front" is the laconic and prosaic way in which the official communique dismisses some of the most spectacular episodes of the war.

To those who have once witnessed this "increased aerial activity" such an announcement conjures up at once a picture of countless aeroplanes in the air—scouting, fighting, diving, spinning, hovering over enemy targets and calmly sending wireless signals through the fountains of enemy fire, photographing the enemy lines, bombing his ammunition dumps and sheds and supply columns, and otherwise "carrying on" in the sky in a manner wholly bewildering to the onlooker, but typifying in supreme degree the indomitable part aviation is playing in this war.

British Airmen Mere Boys.

With a candor often uncommon in times of strife the British communique may end from day to day with the simple statement that one or two or three or four "of our machines have not returned." This means they have either been hit and forced to land in the enemy's lines or have been shot down to a fate more certain. It is no child's play to circle above a German battery observing for hours or more, or to be tortured by exploding shells and black shrapnel puffballs coming nearer like the extending finger tips of some hand of death. But they are little more than children—these mere boys who are bringing the luster of aviating fame to the British aviation service. Some are scarcely eighteen. It is rare to find a flying man over twenty-five.

In the aggregate, however, the losses in the flying corps are as nothing compared with the useful and vital work the "wingers" accomplish. Without them the big guns would have no far-seeing eyes to correct their shells. Without them and the hundreds of photographs they daily take the mapmakers could not trace each detail of the enemy's positions. Without them the general staff could not accurately know just what is going by day and night behind the enemy lines. Without them modern war would lose its most fascinating phase.

Young Britisher's Daring.

The "good flying" of a single day on the British front alone may represent a day of a hundred flights, a day of four-score aeroplanes in wing-to-wing combat, a day of a thousand personal incidents and deeds of daring in the once strange strata of high, thin air.

It might tell, for instance, of how Lieutenant A in a fast flying scout machine encountered a squadron of twelve German Rolands. The odds were one-sided enough, but the young Britisher decided to take a chance. He climbed swiftly and surely until he got far above the German machines, then he dived down to the level of the hostile craft. Evidently the Germans were intent upon some errand which they proposed to carry out in force, for they paid no heed to the khaki-clad airman until he deliberately dived into them, firing as he came. This threw the twelve Germans into a panic and their formation was entirely broken up. Meanwhile Lieutenant A got beneath the nearest machine and fired an entire drum of cartridges into it, at fifteen yards. The hostile machine collapsed and "crashed." That is a supreme word in the lexicon of the flying corps. A machine may fall or dive, but until it is actually seen to "crash" it is not counted as an enemy "casualty."

Engaged Three Machines.

After seeing his particular enemy "crash" Lieutenant A drew off to think things over. He was somewhat amazed to see still more hostile machines coming up in formation. But he dashed at the leader of the newcomers and fired at him in a spiral nose dive to a "crash." This led to still more complications, and the intrepid little pilot soon found himself engaged with three machines. His fight with these was indecisive. "For" said the official record, "having expended all his ammunition Lieutenant A set off for home."

A few days later, it is related, he took a running dive into a formation of twenty hostile machines with all the self-sacrificing eagerness that have in the midst of a flock of sparrows. Before he was through he had sent three adversaries "crashing."

"This time," says the record, "he returned to one of our aerodromes and thus avoiding the enemy's anti-aircraft guns, he fell in state stills to 1,500 feet, suddenly righted himself and dived at the balloon. He opened and continued firing until he almost touched the big gas bag. Just as he passed over it the thing burst into flame and was destroyed in a few seconds."

Airmen Shunning a Fall.

This same little Lieutenant A seems to persist in the records of the service. One day he was crossing the enemy lines at 11,500, when he found himself directly above a German kite balloon sent up for artillery observation. Pretending to be in trouble and thus avoiding the enemy's anti-aircraft guns, he fell in state stills to 1,500 feet, suddenly righted himself and dived at the balloon. He opened and continued firing until he almost touched the big gas bag. Just as he passed over it the thing burst into flame and was destroyed in a few seconds.

The Germans have lately adopted

the use of "stalling" and shunning a fall out of control. It is a thrilling but not uncommon thing to see a German machine when closely pressed turn its tail straight up in the air and dive toward the earth at a distance of 2,000 or 3,000 feet, and just at the uninitiated onlooker would expect a "crash" it flattens out and

starts pell mell for its own lines. One does not always get away with this bit of aerial strategy, however, as is shown by the record of Captain B. After attacking three hostile machines, he saw one of them going down in a spinning nose dive. He suspected the honesty of the dive and decided to do a little diving "on his own." This dramatic downward duel continued for half 5,000 feet, until the German was driven into a spin "and seen to crash."

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